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The American Embassy Newsletter

Embassy of the United States of America to Lithuania

Special Features:

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Message from Chargé d'Affaires Tom Kelly

The highlight of the summer for every American is our Independence Day, the Fourth of July. This year, at the U.S. Ambassador's Residence, I had the honor to host this year's official celebration in Lithuania. We celebrated the occasion by honoring six special individuals who exemplify the special U.S.-Lithuanian relationship. They included First Lieutenant Donatas Rupšys, who commanded 46 Lithuanian troops in an infantry platoon serving with multinational forces in Iraq; Egidijus Aleksandravicius, a courageous defender of civil society and tolerance; Kristina Misiniene, who leads the fight in Lithuania against trafficking in persons; Virmidas Neverauskas, who manages the internationally successful *Sporto Vilka* youth baseball team; Dmitrijus Kumašovas, who heads a Lithuanian INTERPOL unit; and Rasa Bagdoniene, the Corporate Affairs manager of Kraft Foods Lietuva, a U.S.-owned firm that sets an outstanding example of corporate citizenship and responsibility.

At the U.S. Mission, summer is also a season of transitions. Last month, we said farewell to Ambassador Stephen Mull, who finished his three-year tour in Lithuania, along with his wife Cheri and son Ryan. We are welcoming a number of new employees to the Mission; I hope you'll have a chance to meet many of them and welcome them to our community soon. New colleagues include Rebecca Dunham, our new Political Economic section chief, who replaces Nancy Cohen; Carlos Aranaga, our new Public Affairs Officer, who replaces Anthony Pahigian; Laurie Bateman, who replaces Terry Girone as the Ambassador's assistant; and Allie Almero, who works with me in the Embassy's Front Office. And of course, on August 10, we will welcome the new U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania John Cloud, who will arrive with his wife Mary. Ambassador Cloud brings a wealth of experience in European and economic issues to this Embassy. (You can read his full biography on our website at www.usembassy.lt.) You'll all have the opportunity to meet him at our next Town Hall meeting for American citizens at the American Center, to be held in September.

As Mission employees come and go, our nation's great friendship with Lithuania remains constant. The most dramatic recent illustration of that friendship occurred in May, when Vice President Cheney and a high-powered U.S. delegation participated with many other regional leaders in a conference organized by Lithuanian authorities to promote democracy in Europe. The Vice President delivered the conference's keynote address. His robust defense of the advance of democracy and freedom in the region attracted worldwide attention. He also met with President Adamkus to discuss important bilateral issues.

Lithuania continues to attract interesting visitors from our nation. Last month, we welcomed a delegation from Omaha, Nebraska, Šiauliai's sister city. The delegation featured Mayor Mike Fahey and a troupe of Native American dancers, who performed in public concerts in Šiauliai and Vilnius. We also welcomed an international song-and-dance ensemble from Brigham Young University in Utah. Some of my Mission colleagues and I also participated a few weeks ago in the National Basketball Association's "Basketball without Borders" event, which brought several NBA players (including many of the best Lithuanian players) together with 50 up-and-coming teenage players from around Europe. Fortunately, we weren't required to guard any of those talented (and tall) kids!

I hope that the rest of your summer is wonderful!

Tom Kelly

News from the Consular Section

Recent Changes to US Tax Law that May Affect Overseas Americans

The *Tax Increase Prevention and Reconciliation Act of 2005* was signed into law on May 17, 2006. The result is a smaller tax exemption, and thus potentially higher taxes, for U.S. expatriates. The provisions are intended to provide an objective standard to determine the amount that taxpayers working abroad can exclude from income and also to subject such individuals to the same tax rates applicable to individuals living and working in the United States who have the same amount of economic income. The non-partisan Joint Committee on Taxation recommended these changes. The proposal is expected to raise \$903 million over five years and \$2.126 billion over ten years. The most significant change for Americans earning income overseas is that income excluded as either foreign earned income or as a housing allowance is included for purposes of determining the marginal tax rates applicable to non-excluded income. For more information, please consult www.irs.gov.

Please encourage any American Citizens living in Lithuania to register with the Consular Section.

Frequently Asked Questions about Avian Influenza

What if I get sick when I am outside the U.S.? If I have a pre existing medical condition, is there anything different I should do?

Please see the Department's travel tips brochure on health issues, including the importance of obtaining adequate medical insurance to cover overseas medical emergencies:

http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html

If you have preexisting medical problems you should carry a letter from your physician, describing the medical condition and any prescription medications, including the generic name of prescribed drugs.

What precautions should I take if I live in or visit an area affected by H5N1 "bird flu"?

Avoid contact with live birds, chickens, ducks, turkeys and geese and their feces, feathers, and pens if at all possible. Children, in particular, should be taught these precautions, and small children may need to be supervised for their protection. Do not purchase or agree to adopt new pet birds from an area in which H5N1 influenza has been reported. Avoid poultry products from areas with H5N1-infected birds. Do not transport live or dead poultry even if it appears to be healthy.

All foods from poultry, including eggs and poultry blood, should be cooked thoroughly. Egg yolks should not be runny or liquid. Because influenza viruses are destroyed by heat, the cooking temperature for poultry meat should be 74 C (165 F).

Can my domestic animals get bird flu?

There have been reports of H5N1 infection in domestic cats, pigs, tigers, leopards, ferrets, and stone martens. The domestic cats are believed to have been infected by eating raw, H5N1-infected birds. Although no human cases of avian influenza A have been associated with contact with infected cats, you should keep your cats inside if there has been a verified outbreak of H5N1 in your area. In addition, avoid contact with stray cats, and inform your local veterinarian if your cat becomes sick after having had contact with birds. You should always follow strict hygiene rules when disposing of animal waste or caring for your pets.

News from the Political/Economic Section

What Happens When a Government 'Collapses'?

The Lithuanian government collapsed on June 1 after the largest party in parliament withdrew its support from the governing coalition. The withdrawal led then-Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas to resign. This might lead Americans, who are unaccustomed to a parliamentary form of government, to say, "How can a government collapse? If the American government 'collapsed', anarchy would surely ensue." However, when people say the parliamentary government 'collapsed', they do not mean that the entire system has been thrown into disarray. Rather, they mean that a new cabinet must be formed by a new or existing prime minister.

The Lithuanian state structure consists of three different entities: the presidency, the parliament (Seimas), and the government. The prime minister represents the government and directs its activities. When someone refers to the Lithuanian government, that person is referring to the prime minister and his 13-member cabinet.

The president is the head of state and decides the basic issues of foreign policy. S/he, together with the Government, conducts foreign policy. The president signs international treaties and submits them to the Seimas for ratification. With the assent of the Seimas, the president appoints and dismisses the Commander of the Armed Forces and has the authority to mobilize the military in the event of armed aggression.

The responsibilities of government include implementing the laws and resolutions of the parliament as well as presidential decrees, coordinating the activities of the ministries and other governmental institutions, preparing the draft state budget, drafting bills and submitting them to parliament for consideration, and establishing and maintaining diplomatic relations with foreign countries and international organizations. In this sense, the Lithuanian government is roughly akin to the United States president's cabinet.

The prime minister of Lithuania is appointed or dismissed by the president and must be approved by the parliament along with his/her cabinet. The process begins when the president nominates a candidate for prime minister who, hopefully, has enough support in parliament to meet with final approval when the government is formally appointed. If the parliament rejects the president's proposal for prime minister, the president must nominate a new candidate or hold early elections. If the parliament approves the president's nominee, the new prime minister-designate must propose a 13-member cabinet to head each of the government ministries.

In the United States, the Senate must approve each member of the president's cabinet with a majority vote before that person can enter his/her respective position. In Lithuania, the government's program and the cabinet are all proposed on one formal 'ticket' to the parliament by the president. The *whole* 'ticket' must be approved by the majority of members of parliament present for the vote in order to empower the new government. If the parliament rejects the proposed government program, the process starts all over again.

After the final approval of the government program, the newly confirmed prime minister and ministers each take an oath to be loyal to the Republic of Lithuania and to observe its constitution and laws. Lithuania has had a total of 13 governments since it regained independence in 1991.



News from the Public Affairs Section

The Public Affairs Section (PAS) at the Embassy is responsible for media relations, academic and cultural programs, and the Information Resource Center.

Promoting U.S. Culture in Lithuania

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During our last town hall meeting, a member of the audience asked what the Embassy does to promote U.S. culture. We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish, but, fortunately, we've had a great deal of help and cooperation from our Lithuanian colleagues across a wide spectrum of educational and cultural institutions. From our mutual love of basketball to our shared passion for jazz, there's a lot to celebrate about Lithuanian-American cultural ties!

We have been fortunate to welcome American art professors, a music theater teacher, jazz musicians, poets, modern dance troupes, photographers, a federal district court judge, and numerous other performers and guest speakers. This list doesn't even include the Fulbright professors and students who come here, work wonders in the community, and leave positive impressions with everyone they meet.

Here are just a few examples of what we've been up to recently:

- The Embassy supported the Brigham Young University International Folkdance Ensemble, which arrived in Vilnius on June 21. The dance group treated hundreds of Lithuanians to a dynamic, exciting, and superbly-choreographed collection of folkdance routines.
- We organized an outdoor performance on June 10 for a group of Native American folklore artists. In a performance of traditional dance and percussion, the artists treated the Vilnius Old Town audience to a glimpse of Native American cultural heritage.
- As part of the "Poetry Spring" poetry festival, U.S. poet Christopher Merrill treated his audience to a poetry reading from his recently published anthology.
- On May 10, we joined up with our "American Corner" at Povilas Visinskis Public Library in Siauliai to put on a traditional U.S. folklore concert. Fulbright alumnus Stephen Warner played an entertaining repertoire of American folk songs to an audience of elementary school children.

We only play a small role in the deep layers of cultural exchange between Lithuanians and Americans. We consider ourselves especially lucky that the Lithuanian-American friendship does much of the work for us. From basketball stars to modern art, the cultures of our two countries have criss-crossed the Atlantic in a vibrant exchange that shows no signs of slowing down.

Go to www.state.gov
for more information
about the U.S. State
Department.

Information from the Regional Security Office

How to Avoid becoming a Victim of Internet Fraud

The term **Internet Fraud** refers to any type of fraud scheme that uses email, web sites, chat rooms or message boards to present fraudulent solicitations to prospective victims, to conduct fraudulent transactions or to transmit the proceeds of fraud to financial institutions or to others connected with the scheme. Here are some tips that can help you avoid becoming a victim:

- Opening documents, playing audio or video files, and clicking on executable links is the same as downloading a document. If you do not trust a site enough to download a document, do not perform any of these other actions.
- Never submit passwords, credit card numbers, or private information via a web browser unless a secure session is active (the “padlock” or the unbroken “key” should be visible at the bottom of the screen).
- Have one credit card that is solely designated for on-line transactions. This makes it easier to monitor for any discrepancies, and allows you to limit your overall exposure to internet fraud to a single card.
- Assume that your web browsing is not private unless you are assured that it is by a reputable site, and a secure session is active. (Most secure sites begin with HTTPS:)
- Configure mail software to not preview or automatically open messages.
- When making purchases from online vendors, determine what actions the web site/company takes if a problem occurs. Consider insuring the transaction and shipment.
- When making purchases from an online auction, review the feedback on the seller that other users have posted.
- The three most common types of Internet fraud are online auction fraud, non-delivery of merchandise or non-payment, and credit/debit card fraud. Check fraud, investment fraud, and computer fraud round out the top six categories of complaints.
- The safest way to purchase items via the Internet is by credit card because you can often dispute the charges if a problem occurs.

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About Our Organization...

The United States' principle objectives in Lithuania are:

Regional Stability: The Mission has no greater goal than working with Lithuania in maximizing our common contribution promoting freedom and security in the world. Above all, this means an active bilateral partnership to make sure that Lithuania gets the assistance it needs to carry out cutting-edge NATO missions, such as its Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. We will also work with Lithuania as it develops niche capabilities that enable its small military to contribute to NATO. Finally, we will encourage Lithuania to continue to serve as an advocate of and role model for pro-democracy forces throughout the former Soviet Union and elsewhere.

Closer Economic Ties: Although there are many areas of cooperation, U.S. trade and investment volumes here lag behind several of Lithuania's European partners. To improve the situation, we are enlisting the government and resident U.S. firms in a campaign to seek more American involvement in this dynamic economy.

Democracy: We are proud of U.S. support for Lithuania's extraordinary success in establishing a strong and vibrant democracy. We will continue those efforts by speaking out in defense of civil society, tolerance, and public probity, and reinforcing those words when possible with training resources.

Law Enforcement: Lithuania and the United States share a common interest in combating international crime and terrorism. We will seek to increase the pace of joint operations between U.S. and Lithuanian law enforcement agencies; expand training initiatives with law enforcement officials and the judiciary; and accelerate the pace of extraditions between our two countries.

Homeland Security: We seek to uphold U.S. immigration law while ensuring that all qualified Lithuanians have the visas they need to visit our country. In particular, we want to ensure that young Lithuanians, the country's future leaders, continue to travel, study, and work legally in the United States. We will also press the government to liberalize bureaucratic requirements imposed on American residents here.

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